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CHARRETTE	

This study is part of the Northampton Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Board will adopt the complete plan in accordance with Mass. General Laws, Chapter 41, §81D and submit all elements to the City Council for their consideration. The Planning Board has designed this process to help the city's efforts to meet Northampton's goals and objectives.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Northampton has an extremely successful downtown central business district. The downtown serves as the cultural and shopping hub of Northampton and is an extremely strong draw for residents of surrounding communities and tourists. Main Street retail vacancy rates are extremely low and even the upper floors of Main Street buildings are largely filled with offices and residences.

Around the country, many similar sized communities have decaying downtowns with high vacancy rates. Even in communities with healthy downtowns, success often means a bustling downtown from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., with relatively little evening and weekend activity. Fortunately Northampton's downtown is bustling day and evening, weekdays and weekends.

A large part of the success of downtown, however, is due to its ability to find market niches that either compete successfully or avoid direct competition with strip shopping malls along King Street, regional shopping malls and other shopping opportunities. This strategy has, unfortunately, created some problems. For many residents, the "new" downtown does not meet community needs the way the "old" downtown did.

To develop a successful market niche, the retail and service sectors have had to define their products differently than in the past, and Northampton has lost many traditional department stores, hardware stores and similar establishments that historically anchored downtown. While this trend is inevitable and is found in most successful central business districts, a valuable element of downtown has been lost.

The Planning Board designed this plan to help insure the continued success of downtown and the city and insure that downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods remain desirable places to shop, work, visit and live for all Northampton residents and visitors.

The study is a comprehensive look at the Northampton central business district and the surrounding commercial areas and residential neighborhoods. This study examines city government's regulatory and non-regulatory actions

that effect the downtown and surrounding areas and identifies areas where those city actions should be changed.

Regulatory actions include zoning, design review, sign standards and other city regulations. Non-regulatory actions include public investment in city streets, sidewalks, lights and the streetscape, policies on the use of city property and other public policies.

Although the Planning Board looked at many city actions, it focused on issues determining the use of public or private land in the downtown and surrounding areas. Other city actions are beyond the scope of this study although they have a peripheral impact on downtown. For example, although having a safe downtown is critical for the continued success and health of downtown and the city, the plan does not focus on the provision of police or fire protection services nor on enforcement of building or health codes.

The Planning Board undertook this study because:

1. The Board feels that Northampton's health is integrally linked with the health of downtown.
2. None of the many studies over the past forty years that have looked at some aspect of downtown have comprehensively examined all areas of city government action affecting downtown. The city's last comprehensive plan, in 1972, did not address many of the relevant issues. The Planning Board believes this examination is overdue.
3. The Board is working on a general or master plan for the city to help guide city actions. The plan will not be one document, however, but will be a series of plan elements. This allows the Planning Board to have a more strategic planning focus, without losing a comprehensive vision for the city.

Although the Planning Board is focusing on the downtown plan for this study, they are very aware of the importance of other commercial areas and

residential neighborhoods for the economic and social health of the community. Downtown Florence, in particular, has a critical economic and social niche and it provides a level of local services to the surrounding community that the central business district cannot provide. Past and future planning efforts have and will continue to focus on the other elements of the mix of land use that make Northampton such a desirable and viable community.

The Downtown Northampton Plan reflects an enormous amount of public participation, and hopefully a large degree of consensus:

1. The Board sought public dialogue and participation through over thirty newspaper, cable television and radio features and through targeted outreach to residents, businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood groups and other identifiable "stakeholders."
2. 150 people, representing a wide cross-section of the community, including residents, business and building owners, and citizens, attended a Downtown Charrette workshop to create a vision of what they want for downtown. The Board distributed over 1,000 brochures inviting people to the Charrette and informing them of the downtown planning process.
3. The Board held twenty well-advertised public meetings and public hearings on the plan. The Board distributed over 1,000 copies of the executive summary, which included an invitation to the final public hearing.

## **HISTORY OF NORTHAMPTON AND THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT**

The City of Northampton is a dominant economic and cultural force in Hampshire County and the upper Pioneer Valley. Northampton is on the west side of the Connecticut River in Hampshire County. Easthampton, Westhampton, Williamsburg, Hatfield and Hadley border Northampton. The city covers 35.7 square miles (22,880 acres). Northampton has a very stable population of approximately 30,000 people.

Northampton was founded in 1654. The rich Connecticut River and associated floodplain agricultural resources that attracted the earliest Native American seasonal encampments also attracted its founders. As Northampton developed, industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors eventually eclipsed agriculture as the most important sectors of the economy.

Since the end of World War II, Northampton's economy has changed significantly. The commercial and service sector of the economy has steadily grown, while the industrial sector has contracted. The role of the Northampton State Hospital and V.A. Hospital have been shrinking for almost a generation, while the roles of other institutions, especially Smith College, has remained stable or grown.

Historically, Northampton's downtown was the leading retail center for Hampshire County. It served as a regional center and it had the largest market share of retail spending. Strip shopping malls, starting in the late 1950's, and later indoor malls, greatly threatened the Central Business District's dominance. This threat to the central business district threatened and decimated towns and small cities around the country.

Today, through the development of a successful market niche, Northampton's downtown serves as a restaurant mecca and its retail sector is a magnet for Hampshire County and surrounding areas. Downtown Northampton is still the most defined urban retail center in the county, although it has a smaller market share of total county retail spending now than in the past and a smaller market share of retail (non-restaurant) spending than the Hampshire Mall. Per capita retail and restaurants sales for Northampton are significantly above those sales for Hampshire County and for the Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Today, the entire City of Northampton, not just the downtown, has extremely vibrant service, commercial, and institutional sectors, and a strong, albeit significantly smaller, industrial sector. The industrial sector has, unfortunately, shrunk significantly in recent years. Although the Northampton State Hospital has closed, the institutional sector is stable with Smith College, the Veterans Affairs Center, the city and other institutional employers. In addition,

Northampton provides housing for the majority of its work force and for many residents who work outside of Northampton.

In downtown Northampton itself, commercial activity has continued to spread out from its Main Street core. Over the past decade, because of the increasing scarcity of affordable downtown first floor retail space and the shortage of high quality office space with available parking, a new wave of redevelopment and revitalization has come to Pleasant Street and other commercial areas off Main Street.

## **PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Previous studies provide a wealth of information relating to the downtown. The Planning Board reviewed and drew on the previous studies on the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods for this plan.

**Parking Survey and Program, Central Business District, Northampton, Massachusetts, February 1953:** This report by Ramp Building Associated surveyed parking facilities and demand and made recommendations for how to address the demand. They identified 838 public and 477 private parking spaces (1,315 total) in the Central Business District in 1953.

**The Master Plan for The City of Northampton, August 1963:** The Northampton Planning Board and Technical Planning Associates wrote the 1963 Master Plan, with federal Urban Renewal Administration funding. The plan identified Northampton's role as a regional center and found that "if Northampton takes necessary steps to improve its central business area to maintain its regional leadership in business, growth of the area towns will be reflected in increased economic activity and consequent attraction to new residents." The plan overestimated this trend and projected a much higher rate of population growth than has occurred.

The **1963 Master Plan** underscored the retail and service sectors' extremely important role in the Northampton economy, especially in the downtown. The report stressed, however, the threat to central business from suburban shopping malls and strips. "Either the central area must be drastically

modernized, or it will be outpaced by competition from outside . . . "

It recommended that the city increase the availability of off-street parking, which the city did, and that the city undertake a large urban renewal program in which the city would tear down many old buildings and private investors would replace those buildings with single use structures. Fortunately, the city never followed through on this last recommendation.

### **Comprehensive Plan for Northampton,**

**Massachusetts, June 1972:** This comprehensive plan was written by Metcalf & Eddy and funded by the federal Urban Renewal Administration. The plan was adopted by the **Northampton Planning Board**. Because of this planning effort the city rewrote its zoning ordinance in 1975 and created the Office of Planning and Development. Although Northampton first adopted zoning in 1926, the 1975 ordinance corrected many problems from earlier ordinances.

The **1972 Comprehensive Plan** identified the importance of the downtown as "the civic and economic heart of the community." It also stressed that civic and "cultural activities attract people to the area, which in turn assist in the overall business and economic activity."

The **1972 Comprehensive Plan** identified the growing economic threat to the downtown by competing strip shopping malls and it acknowledged that the "future role of the CBD may be defined as that of a civic, cultural, and specialty merchandising center . . . "

The plan also identified problems with vehicular and pedestrian circulation and with inadequate parking. It contains a good historic inventory of circulation and parking resources.

The **1972 Comprehensive Plan** alleged "the various mixed land uses usually tend to produce conflicts of various types. The conflicts in the Northampton CBD are primarily between residential and commercial uses, especially where the apartments have been developed on the upper floors of the same building housing Main Street commercial activity." The plan identified some areas of blight and inferred that the solution to this blight might be demolishing several older buildings. Fortunately, the city never followed

through on recommendations to reduce this mixed use or to do large scale demolition.

A June 1971 draft memo from Metcalf & Eddy to the Northampton Planning Board goes into greater detail about issues relating to the Central Business District.

**The Pleasant/River Redevelopment Project, May 1975:** The Northampton Redevelopment Authority prepared this report and supporting documentation for as an outgrowth of the 1972 Comprehensive Plan. The city designed this state-funded urban renewal project to make the Central Business District a better place to live and to revitalize the downtown. Unlike many urban renewal projects, this project did not recommend demolition of most of the Main Street buildings. The 5.5 million dollar project (1975 dollars) did envision massive property acquisition and rehabilitation.

**City of Northampton, Mass., Downtown Business Area, Commercial Revitalization District (CARD), February 1980:** The Northampton Planning Department wrote this proposal to create a Downtown CARD, which was approved. "The intent of the CARD program is to encourage the revitalization of established commercial districts by making available reduced-interest industrial revenue bond financing . . . to eligible commercial development projects."

The report included a list of opportunities and problems that might shape continued revitalization of downtown. It stressed "the historic ambience of downtown as a major advantage that is held over new commercial areas . . ."

**1981 Parking Study, City of Northampton:** This **1981 Parking Study**, by John Martin and John Mullin, inventoried parking problems and made recommendations on how to reduce these problems. While identifying a need for more parking, the report cautioned against allowing parking to replace the pedestrian scale of downtown. Since 1981, more detailed parking studies have been done and many improvements, including construction of the John Gare Parking Garage, have been completed.

**Resource Team Report for Northampton, Massachusetts, October 1981:** The National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic

Preservation provided this assessment of downtown. The report stressed that while downtown Northampton is very successful, an ongoing comprehensive examination is critical to insure continued success.

The report focuses on three areas: urban design, traffic circulation, and improving management and marketing for the downtown commercial sector. It includes a 1981 inventory of occupancy rates.

The city has implemented many of the report's recommendations since 1981. Among the significant recommendations:

1. Improve the Pleasant Street and Conz/Old South Street gateways to downtown.
2. Improve the back of the buildings on the south side of Main Street.
3. Improve sidewalk and traffic safety, improve downtown public signage and use care with downtown banners and promote appropriate colors for downtown buildings.
4. Market downtown and encourage small business development.

**Commercial Space Inventory, Northampton, MA Card Districts, June 1985:** The Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts conducted an inventory of gross square footage by use in Northampton. In the downtown, they identified 1,166,954 square feet of gross commercial space, with 33.4% of the space offices (including banks), 50.5% retail, 1.2% industrial, 7.4% services, and 7.5% vacant.

**Central Business District Parking Study, Northampton, Massachusetts & related Financial Summaries, August 1985:** This parking study by Ramp Engineering Associates provided a detailed inventory of parking, identified parking deficiencies and recommended alternatives. This report was critical in documenting the need for the city to build a parking garage. The report identified 1,222 public and 1,209 private parking spaces in the central business district (2,431 total).

**Mayor's Task Force on Land Use and Development,**

**Final Report, February 1986:** Then Mayor David B. Musante Jr.'s ad-hoc committee wrote this strategic plan. It provided findings and recommendations on housing, economic development and natural resources.

The **1986 Mayors Task Force** report listed as goals to "preserve and maintain the city's unique architectural and historical resources, such as the Downtown Historic District . . . Integrate public and private improvements into the downtown area so as to complement the unique character and appearance of the area . . . Strengthen and improve commercial development in clearly defined and established commercial centers-- Downtown . . . so as to maintain the traditional structure and character of the community . . . " The report made no other recommendations that directly affect the downtown.

**Strategic Plan for Resource Conservation, March 1987:** The strategic plan was prepared for the city by Lozano, White and Associates, Inc. with a state Strategic Planning Grant. The strategic planning process primarily focused on residential development and preserving sensitive ecological resources. It did make several suggestions, however, for maintaining the integrity of downtown and the surrounding neighborhood, including:

1. "Encourage the development of traditional Northampton housing types, that is, two- and three-family dwellings" by zoning changes. (The zoning partially implemented this recommendation.)
2. "Establish a Design Review process to be applied to the Downtown Area." The proposed design review would regulate new construction and substantial renovations that could have a visual impact on downtown. The purpose of design review would be to insure that regulated projects respect and preserve the best of downtown architecture and urban design.

**Northampton Parking Garage, Market and Economic Analysis & Residual Land Development Potential,**

**1987:** RKG Associates, Inc. prepared the report as part of the planning for the parking garage. The report provided a useful discussion of retail, commercial and residential uses, rents and vacancy

rates in the downtown. It identified that, in 1987, demand for quality housing and office space was rising and the inventory was shrinking. The report concluded that as downtown success continues, "development may force some retailers out of their locations into less expensive and less desirable space, as prime spaces are leased or sold to larger more financially secure retailers (often national or regional franchises). If alternative space is not available, these smaller retailers may be forced out of the Northampton market altogether."

**Northampton Cultural Plan, January 1989:** The plan identified steps the city and the arts' community could take to make art and cultural activities even more a part of Northampton life. The **Public Art Plan, 1994** identifies ways to help public art in Northampton and contains an inventory of public art on public and private property, including in the downtown.

**Economic Development Component Strategic Plan, City of Northampton, April 1991:** The **Economic Development Strategic Plan** focused on needed citywide actions. It does identify the need to "strengthen and improve commercial development in clearly defined and established centers: Downtown, Florence Center, Pleasant Street, King Street" and suggests looking for appropriate locations for the expansion of commercial zoning.

**City of Northampton Local Historic Districts, Final Report, June 1991:** The report, by a local historic district study committee created by City Council, discusses four proposed local historic districts, including a Downtown Northampton District. "The rich mixture of commercial, institutional and religious buildings is enhanced by prestige residential areas that developed along major entry corridors . . . The architectural fabric and the history of Northampton are inseparable . . . A wide range of architectural styles compose the fabric of the streetscape . . . It is this eclectic mix of buildings of distinction that justifies the architectural importance of the district."

**Streamlining the Zoning Process: How We Can Simplify Your Life Without Threatening Your Quality of Life!, June 1994:** The Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Mayor Mary L. Ford, and the Office of Planning and Development sponsored this report. Many of the resulting procedural and zoning changes will simplify the regulatory process for downtown redevelopment.

## **INVENTORY INFORMATION**

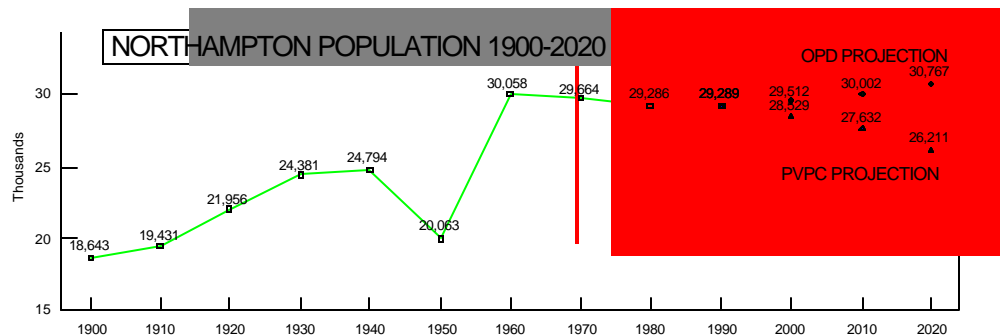
### **POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS**

Northampton's population is approximately 30,000 people (29,289 by 1990 U.S. Census, 30,767 by 1994 City Census) and has remained relatively stable since 1950. The Office of Planning and Development projects that the population will increase only slightly over the next twenty years (2.0 to 2.5% per decade).

The migration rates of people moving into and out of Northampton are high, but in and out migrations appear to balance. College age students contribute to the population turnover, but there is also a significant amount of turnover at other age levels. Sometimes this turnover reduces the sense of a stable neighborhood and residents' commitment to their community, but may also contribute to the vibrancy of Northampton.

Approximately 61% of employed Northampton residents work in Northampton, while most of the remaining 39% of the employed residents commute out of the city, mostly to Amherst and cities and towns in Hamden County. Northampton residents fill slightly over half the jobs in Northampton. (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Journey-to-Work statistics, prepared by P.V.P.C.)

**The number of people who live within walking distance of downtown is extremely high for a city the size of Northampton.** Approximately 41% of Northampton's population lives within one mile of the center of downtown.



**DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS (AS % OF CITY)**

Live within one mile of center of downtown	12,050	41%
Live within one-half mile of center of downtown	6,750	23%
Live in or abutting Central Business District	1,000	3.4%

(Source: 1990 U.S. Census. All figures are approximate.)

This downtown population, especially with the wide variety of incomes that exist, **may be the most important single factor in allowing for a healthy downtown.** This population provides a base of customers for downtown businesses and helps provide the vibrancy that is critical to the health of downtown. It also generates a need for a variety of housing types and opportunities.

There are a wide variety of incomes and housing stock in the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods. **Downtown also has a much higher proportion of rental units than the rest of Northampton.**

**RENTAL HOUSING (AS % ALL UNITS)**

City of Northampton	48.6%
Within 1 mile of CBD center	68.4%
Within 1/2 mile of CBD center	80.8%

(Source: 1990 U.S. Census. The presence of Smith College does skew these figures. These figures include all Smith College and private rental housing **except dormitories.**)

**ZONING INVENTORY**

Northampton's zoning has encouraged a healthy downtown and a healthy city. The zoning divides downtown and its surrounding residential neighborhoods into the following zoning districts:

**Central Business District (CB):**

CB is the densest business district in the city and preserves a pedestrian-oriented downtown. Retail, service and commercial uses with very high pedestrian traffic (restaurants, stores, banks), commercial and mixed use buildings, municipal

parking, private parking, and heavy pedestrian traffic are all vital for a healthy CB district.

To preserve pedestrian orientation, uses which generate heavy automobile traffic are regulated with a special permit (take-out restaurants) or prohibited (automobile sales and service).

Residential uses are encouraged, but only as part of mixed use buildings with retail, service and/or commercial uses.

Parking requirements in the CB are the least restrictive in the city. They are designed to encourage use of private and public parking lots by different users at different times during a day. Changes in use of existing building space do not need to provide new parking and do not get credit for parking, regardless of whether they are changing to a more or less intensive use. Parking is required for new construction and expansions, except when a second floor is added to a one-story building (to encourage one-story buildings to build up). With a special permit, building owners can pay into the parking fund for future parking in-lieu of providing parking spaces.

No street frontage is required and there is no minimum lot size for commercial uses in the CB. There are stricter dimensional requirements for mixed residential uses, which discourages some residential uses.

**General Business (GB)**

GB is similar to Central Business in many respects and can include either be pedestrian or automobile oriented businesses. Business and mixed business/residential uses allowed in CB are generally allowed in GB. Automobile sales and service are allowed in GB even though they are not permitted in CB.

As with all other non-CB districts in the City, GB uses must provide parking to accommodate the expected car traffic to the facility.

Generally, the GB district has less stringent dimensional regulations than any commercial district except for CB. Frontage requirements are stricter in GB than NB.



### Neighborhood Business (NB)

NB was designed to serve as neighborhood shopping or village centers to serve local needs. In the downtown area, many of the buffers around downtown are NB. Because these buffers generally have lower rent than CB (given their location and restrictions) but are located relatively close to the center of the city, they have attracted many uses that draw business from a much wider area than the immediate neighborhood. Some NB zones cover only one building, typically a building that was convenience commercial (or mom-and-pop store) in 1975.

Small and relatively low traffic businesses and convenience commercial uses are allowed, along with most residential uses. NB uses must provide parking to accommodate the expected car traffic to the facility.

NB dimensional requirements are stricter than either CB or GB, but are not very restrictive. As noted above, frontage requirement is actually less in NB than GB.

### General Industrial (GI)

GI is the city's traditional industrial zone. It includes light industrial uses, warehouses, and some limited automobile sales. Housing and retail are generally not allowed. Old mill buildings zoned GI in Florence and Bay State have been successfully converted to smaller industrial and artists' space. These conversions can be difficult, however, because of the limited market for these uses and the restrictions of the zone.

### Special Industrial (SI)

Originally created as a catch-all district for industrial/business areas that didn't fit in any other categories. These uses allow a mix of business and industrial uses, but many of the uses in all the city's SI are pre-existing non-conforming.

### Urban Residential-C (URC)

URC is the city's densest and most permissive residential zoning district. Single to multifamily homes are permitted. While pure commercial uses are not allowed, mixed residential/office uses are with a

special permit. The standards for when these uses are appropriate are not clear. In addition, there are no standards for what percent of a site should be residential to be considered mixed use.

The map on the next page shows existing downtown zoning.

The key provisions of the zoning ordinance that have aided downtown are:

1. **Mixed use** (including retail, restaurant, office and housing) is encouraged. This has helped create a downtown vibrancy that is very rare in communities the size of Northampton.
2. **The zoning has encouraged the preservation of housing in the Central Business District and surrounding residential neighborhoods** at relatively high densities. This housing is one of the most important ingredients of downtown vitality. Housing density is high enough to create a pedestrian scale and provide a base of customers for downtown, while remaining at a level desirable to many residents.
3. Zoning allows the **reuse of existing** downtown building space without any new **parking** facilities, when the reuse does not increase the floor area within a building. This allows use changes without needing to provide additional parking or get credit for unused parking spaces.
4. Zoning does **not require additional parking** when **a second floor is added to a one floor building**. This has allowed a very small expansion of downtown space while encouraging building size and height more similar to the rest of downtown, without the loss of any parking or potential parking spaces.
5. Through height restrictions and parking requirements, the zoning **avoids creating any incentive to demolish historic buildings** and replace them with taller buildings.
6. Other aspects of the Zoning strike a **balance**

between the need to allow redevelopment and avoid unnecessary regulations, and the need to preserve those aspects of downtown, the surrounding neighborhoods and the city that the community has identified as important. Over the years, there has been an ongoing discussion about this balance and whether it needs any adjustment.

In spite of the many aspects of zoning that have aided the health of downtown and its surrounding, the city needs to examine some **aspects of our zoning**. The Zoning Anomalies map (after Zoning Map) shows some of these zoning issues. Among the areas that we examined are:

1. The zoning boundaries of the Central Business District are not the same as the boundaries of the actual central business area, nor the boundaries of what the community wants the CBD to become. In particular, some areas zoned General Business and Neighborhood Business have primarily "downtown" type businesses (i.e., businesses serving citywide needs which can thrive in the center of Northampton).
2. The slow but steady expansion of commercial uses, primarily offices, into residential areas surrounding downtown is a concern to some and an opportunity to others. This expansion meets a need for office space, maintains mixed use neighborhoods, and encourages downtown investment. On the other hand, many residents of the neighborhoods surrounding downtown see these changes damaging the fabric of their neighborhoods.
3. A large percentage of existing buildings and lots in the central business district and in surrounding neighborhoods are legal because they predate our current zoning, but they could not be replicated. Some dimensional and density provisions provide impediments to construction of new buildings that would be in keeping with the neighborhood character.

4. In some areas, especially the Special Industrial District and General Business District in the downtown study area, many uses and buildings are preexisting and non-conforming. In addition, investors find that there are many buildings or sites which they **cannot** practically adapt for uses that conform to the zoning. This raises the issue of whether the zoning is realistic and whether it really reflects what the city hopes to see in that area.
5. In one General Business area there is not one business in the district.
6. In the Central Business District, site plan review is too weak to preserve the integrity of downtown design if an applicant proposes to build a new building or demolish an old building.
7. Sign regulations are a perennial issue, with the regulated community feeling that the rules are too inflexible and many residents feeling that there is not enough control over "bad" signage.

## **HISTORIC AND DESIGN RESOURCE INVENTORY**

Nineteenth-century buildings dominate downtown, which retains the architectural features and pedestrian scale of that period. **The design integrity and pedestrian scale of downtown is one of the strongest unifying features in the downtown.**

Most of downtown Northampton is in a National Register Historic District. The 1975 nomination to place downtown on the National Register notes:

The district is a mixture of commercial and institutional architecture. In general, the institutional and religious buildings form the jewels in the more modest settings of stores or restaurants with offices or dwellings above.

The institutions include the courthouse . . . , City Hall, Memorial Hall . . . , churches . . . , a theatre, banks, and educational buildings . . . There is thus a rich mixture of function

which creates a lively and diverse area.

Also noteworthy is the shape of the . . . district. None of Northampton's streets are straight, because of the topography, and Main Street is no exception. It is not only its curving shape which creates the sense of a natural and even intimate town center, but also the fact that one can never look up or down the street for any distance without having the vista closed off. Thus the area is like a large outdoor room, defined through plastic shapes of varying scale and materials. The streets which lead off Main Street share the characteristics of irregularity and close off the view as well. The area is therefore physically as well as functionally distinctly defined.

In downtown Northampton, even the vernacular, or ordinary, nineteenth century commercial buildings provide great architectural details and a respect for other buildings and for the downtown setting. More than a place where significant historical events occurred, downtown Northampton is historic because it retains the best of the character and vibrancy of a nineteenth century downtown.

The design integrity of downtown is as significant as its historical integrity. Northampton residents cite the human or pedestrian-scale nature of downtown, the architectural detail, the lack of "dead areas," the liveliness of the streetscape, and the integration of commercial and institutional land uses with the surrounding residential areas as all being extremely important to the downtown.

The neighborhoods surrounding the downtown also contain a rich collection of historical and design features. Historic buildings, rich architectural detail, a liveable scale of development, densities high enough to support pedestrian scale activities, and an attractive streetscape all contribute to the liveability of Northampton's downtown residential neighborhoods and, with some exceptions, the attractiveness of commercial areas surrounding the downtown.

Although downtown and its surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods retain some very positive design features, both King Street and

Pleasant Street remain areas in transition, at least as far as design goes. Although these streets serve as entryways to downtown and contain some attractive and desirable features, neither has a particularly clear identity.

## **PARKING INVENTORY**

The Central Business District has approximately 3,186 parking spaces. Approximately 1,329 of these spaces are in city off-street parking lots and in the parking garage, 477 are on-street metered spaces and 1380 are private spaces (including County and city owned spaces not available to the public).

Unlike many cities, which have lost the liveability of their downtowns by allowing parking to become the dominant theme, Northampton provides parking without creating seas of asphalt or undermining the pedestrian scale of downtown. Northampton's parking has remained pedestrian friendly because the most off-street parking is hidden from Main Street by buildings, curving streets and topographic relief. In addition, buildings have not been demolished to make room for parking, the downtown parking structure fits into the fabric of downtown, and mixed uses and nearby residential uses have remained healthy.

The availability of public and private spaces has grown steadily for forty years, but it has barely kept up with the demand.

	1953	1985	1994	1995
<b>PUBLIC</b>	838	1222	1763	1806
<b>PRIVATE</b>	477	1209	1423	1380
<b>TOTAL</b>	1315	2431	3186	3186

(The 1994 and 1995 Office of Planning and Development study include Old School Commons. It is unclear if they counted these 128 spaces in earlier parking studies.)

The construction of a parking structure in 1989 provided a major improvement in the availability of downtown parking. **Of critical importance to the success of downtown is that structured parking allows for high-density parking without creating a dead area in the downtown streetscape.** The design of the structure fits into downtown and provides a much more friendly face than any surface parking lot

ever could.

Even with the parking structure, parking, especially short term parking, can be extremely tight in Northampton. In particular, parking problems occur because:

1. There is a severe shortage of short term on-street parking spots that allow people to run into a store quickly.

Each new traffic circulation and safety project usually results in a net loss of some on-street parking. This is particularly a problem for stores, such as video stores, which rely on people making brief stops.

2. Along lower Main Street, near the highest concentration of downtown's restaurants, finding evening parking spots is especially difficult.
3. During the Christmas shopping season, all downtown lots can be close to capacity.
4. Most private parking lots are typically **underutilized** at night, when parking is most difficult.

Since 1953, most planning studies identified the need for parking spaces. **As noted above, we must balance the need for more parking spaces, however, with caution against creating an asphalt city with the dead spaces that parking lots can create.**

The demand for parking spaces is growing both because of the health and vibrancy of the downtown and because of a general increase in automobile usage.

Besides building more parking lots and structures, the city effectively uses "soft" solutions to create more parking spaces. These include:

1. Metering previously free parking lots to create a higher turnover and provide much needed short term parking spaces.
2. A parking reserve fund allows developers of new downtown space to pay into the fund in-lieu of creating required parking spaces.

This has funded the creation of parking spaces that can serve multiple needs at different times.

3. The parking reserve fund is set high enough that developers have an incentive to create parking on their own lot, if that is an option, rather than paying into the fund.

Other possible "soft" solutions include:

1. Encouraging the use of private parking lots at night when they are available.
2. Encouraging better lighting, signage and use in alleys to encourage pedestrian access. This access could shorten the walking distance from available parking to existing stores and restaurants.
3. Encourage stores to locate in alleys near parking lots and in the rear of buildings facing parking lots, to provide greater access to nearby parking.

## **CIRCULATION INVENTORY**

Circulation includes the movement of pedestrians, bicycles, automobiles, trucks and buses.

Pedestrian traffic in downtown Northampton is very high for a city of 30,000 (see chart in Appendix). This traffic is significantly less than that often found in the central business district of a large vibrant city. Because of previous investments in downtown sidewalks, the sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate this traffic.

Pedestrian crosswalks in the downtown are well designed to hold the flow of pedestrians. The walks are marked by standard painted lines (sometimes with crosshatching) and, usually, have wheelchair ramps. None of the crosswalks use pavers or raised elevations to send a message that they are part of the sidewalk, instead of the street. (See Downtown Plan Crosswalks Map.)

Circulation on city streets and to municipal properties for people with disabilities is generally quite good. There are some areas, however, where access is poor. In particular, wheelchair access along streets or to

stores is limited in a two areas by steps within the city right-of-way and by a lack of audible signals at the traffic signals. (See also the city's A.D.A. Transition Plan.)

Within the central business district, there are no special provisions for bicycle movement and no public all-weather bicycle storage facilities. There are, however, several links and proposed links to bring bicycles downtown. The Northampton Bike Path, which ends less than one-half mile from downtown, provides a link from downtown to Florence and Look Park (and eventually to Leeds and Williamsburg). The planned extension of the Norwottuck Rail Trail, which will end approximately three-quarters of a mile from downtown, will link with Hadley and Amherst. A proposed rail trail on the south side of downtown could eventually provide a link to Easthampton and Southampton. (See rail trail map.)

Downtown traffic improvements over the past decades have helped improve or maintain motor-vehicle circulation, even while the number of vehicles on the roads continues to climb. Unfortunately, many of these improvements have reduced the number of on-street parking spaces, which are the parking spaces in greatest demand.

Planned improvements to Route 66/West Street, South Street/Old South Street and, eventually, a possible West Street bypass could improve traffic circulation and accommodate increases in traffic. These improvements also have the potential of creating a loss of more downtown parking spaces and, if not carefully designed, harm the fabric of downtown. Other future traffic improvements could, potentially, harm the pedestrian scale of downtown by creating wide street crossings and other unsafe or "dead" areas that are difficult and undesirable for pedestrians to cross.

Alleys and back entrances, many in parking lots, allow deliveries to many businesses with minimal impacts on vehicular and pedestrian circulation.

## **PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES**

Outdoor spaces range from formal city parks to informal quasi-public spaces. These include:

1. Pulaski Park, with its new tot lot
2. The Nagle Downtown Walkway, including the Pleasant Street park by the Depot parking lot
3. Veterans Field Recreation Area (approximately 1/4 mile from downtown).
4. Front of Memorial Hall
5. Front of City Hall
6. Hampshire County Courthouse yard
7. 64 Gothic Street park and fountain (privately owned with a public easement.
8. Agnes Fox Field
9. Hampton Court fountain (privately owned)
10. Steps in front of 135 Main Street (**probably privately owned, but possibly** city owned)
11. Terraced area by Parking Garage
12. The land in front of Fleet Bank and the First Churches. (Now or **formerly** owned by the City as part of the street right-of-way. Current ownership is unclear.)

The most formal of these areas, Pulaski Park, is the most heavily used of these facilities, with all types of uses and users represented. The least formal of these areas, however, 135 Main Street's front steps and the First Churches' front lawn, are among the most heavily used public and quasi-public spaces in downtown. People seeking a place to sit downtown use these areas.

Other public areas, including the terrace by the Parking Garage and the small unfinished park in the Nagle Walkway by Pleasant Street, are infrequently used. In addition, the space in front of Fleet Bank (109 Main Street) receives very little use for Main Street, probably because it looks and feels as if it is private space.

Heavily used parks are those in or near the flow of foot traffic with the simple facilities needed to serve residents needs. Other less used public spaces, however, often serve critical neighborhood needs. The privately owned park at 64 Gothic Street, for example, receives moderate use from the immediate neighborhood, especially Sunday mornings, but infrequent use during the weekdays.

## **OTHER PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE**

Over the years the city has committed significant funds to public infrastructure. It is unlikely that

downtown could have become so successful without these improvements, although the improvements are only one of many factors in downtown's success. Improvements have been funded by a combination of grant funding, user fees and general revenue.

Important public infrastructure improvements have included maintenance of cast iron street lights, sidewalk and paver reconstruction, street trees, the parking garage and surface parking lots, public buildings and public spaces. The maintenance of several public spaces and removal of trash and debris by the Northampton Honor Court has allowed many of these facilities to remain clean and attractive at a low cost to the city.

Street signs are also an important part of public infrastructure. The city has improved parking signage in recent years and is continuing efforts to reduce confusing signage. Except a parking garage sign and commercial billboards, there are not welcoming signs at the entryways to downtown or signs that would draw a visitor downtown.

The maps on the preceding pages summarize the location of some of these facilities.

## **DOWNTOWN LAND USE**

The mix of uses in downtown and surrounding neighborhoods helps create the vibrancy that characterizes Northampton. Institutional, office, retail, restaurants and other commercial uses all complement each other and keep Northampton vibrant at different hours of the day. While many other downtowns, including those much larger than Northampton, have enough offices and institutional uses to appear vibrant during the working day, it takes a much broader mix of uses to remain vibrant in the evenings and weekends.

As discussed earlier, housing in the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods is one of the most important elements of keeping downtown vital, and is critical to supporting the downtown businesses. Housing in the study area includes housing above commercial buildings, apartment buildings in and near the downtown, multi-family housing of every size, and many single family homes. Housing in the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods spans many price ranges.

There are nine business or industrial zones in the downtown study area, besides the Central Business District. These can complement downtown and provide room for a small downtown expansion for everyone's mutual benefit. Unfortunately, they also have the potential to weaken the downtown corridor with conflicting uses or certain types of competition.

**King Street Neighborhood Business District just north of Hotel Northampton:** Although Neighborhood Business (NB) districts are designed for areas which serve local needs, this NB district contains businesses which draw people from greater distances.

**King Street Highway Business District north of Summer and North Streets:** This is the beginning of the auto-oriented King Street strip. This area has provided the greatest local competition to downtown in years past, although as downtown developed its market niche the competition lessened.

**Bridge Street/Market Street/Hawley Street Neighborhood Business District:** This area contains some businesses that draw people from greater distances and more traditional commercial uses serving the local area.

**Green Street Neighborhood Business District:** This area has been in transition for several years. It has gone from a highly successful shopping area to a declining area, and is slowly recovering, with some Smith College and private sector investment. Smith College dominates this area, and owns most of the buildings in this district.

**Clark Avenue General Business District:** This is the only business district in the city with no business uses. The district is all multi-family housing.

**West Street General Industrial District:** The former National Felt factory, which is now vacant, provides both an enormous opportunity and a threat to this area and the surrounding neighborhoods. Under the current zoning, this will be a very difficult property to redevelop.

**Hawley Street and Service Center Special Industrial Districts:** Special Industrial is the catch-all zone for mixed industrial, commercial and nonconforming uses. There is no clear plan for what the community

would like these areas to become.

The maps and table in the appendix show the mix of uses in the central business district, surrounding commercial districts, and multi-family housing in nearby residential areas. These maps were prepared based on spring, 1994 data. Because of the dynamic nature of downtown businesses, the mix of businesses is constantly changing and responding to market conditions.

### **DOWNTOWN DEFINITION**

There is no exact geographic boundary to downtown. Downtown as seen by residents, downtown as seen by store owners, the Central Business District zone, the areas where the city has invested in underground lighting and so on, each tell a slightly different story about our values, our goals and our opportunities.

The downtown definition maps outline some of these downtown boundaries for each parameter. The other downtown maps that follow identify other opportunities and resources that the Planning Board considered in their study.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

*We envision downtown Northampton strengthening its role as the commercial, cultural and institutional center of the city and the county. Downtown is, and should remain, vibrant and pedestrian oriented. Maintaining this vitality requires strong residential neighborhoods in and around downtown, a pedestrian friendly and safe urban core and a healthy city.*

*The vibrant commercial city-center consists of Main Street, the side streets off Main Street and the entire Central Business District. We envision an expanded Central Business District that encourages business expansion while insuring that the expanded Central Business District develops the character that has made the existing core so successful. If the city does not expand the Central Business District, more businesses will become part of the strip development of King Street or move out of Northampton or to currently undeveloped areas of the city.*

*The vitality of commercial, business, industrial and residential areas surrounding the Central Business District is also critical to the health of the city. These areas complement the Central Business District and help make downtown vibrant.*

*We believe that maintaining the housing and neighborhoods in the downtown and within walking distance of downtown is a critical ingredient for a vibrant downtown. Residents living in and near the downtown supply a steady source of revenue for downtown businesses and supply foot traffic that helps keep downtown vibrant and safe. Residents living near the downtown, who can walk downtown, need less downtown parking than visitors from out of the downtown area.*

*Downtown is a critical part of the engine that drives the economic and social health of Northampton. Because of the economic and social spinoffs, even residents who never shop or work downtown benefit from its health and vitality. Likewise, downtown can only remain vibrant if the rest of Northampton retains the attractions and economic health that make Northampton such a desirable place to live. Downtown, Florence and other commercial areas of the city must continue to complement each other in the type of economic activities that they*



*provide and they must all continue to provide needed services to the surrounding neighborhoods.*

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Planning Board identified the following goals and objectives for downtown Northampton.

**GOAL 1: Maintain and expand downtown as a vibrant mix of land uses. Strengthen the critical mass of downtown retail and office uses in the downtown. Maintain downtown as the cultural, institutional and governmental center of the city and county**

### **Goal 1 Objectives:**

- 1-1. Expand the Central Business District to encourage new businesses to locate downtown, encourage development to be compatible with the character of downtown and maximize compact pedestrian-scale development. Any CBD expansion must preserve downtown's residential neighborhoods and housing.**
- 1-2. Create a vision of how the downtown commercial core should be expanded in future years if downtown continues to grow.**
- 1-3. Amend the zoning map to reflect current uses that fit into this vision of downtown and reduce non-conformities and anomalies.**
- 1-4. Channel commercial growth, especially offices, into downtown and other pedestrian-scale urban areas. Commercial development in previously undeveloped areas (greenfields), such as the planned business park, and commercial development on the "strip" section of King Street are most appropriate for those businesses that are not practical in Northampton's pedestrian-scale urban areas.**
- 1-5. Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and urban design compatible with traditional Northampton development.**
- 1-6. Preserve the density of housing in and within walking distance of downtown and encourage new downtown mixed residential/ residential developments.**
- 1-7. Provide coherent development of commercial areas surrounding downtown to provide for local residential needs and to complement downtown development.**
- 1-8. Encourage state, county and city governments and private institutions to retain or expand existing downtown offices and facilities.**

See also objectives:

- 2-1: Preserve the residential neighborhoods that complement the commercial downtown.
- 5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.
- 5-8: Encourage downtown cultural events.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

**Zoning Text Changes**  
**Zoning Map Changes**  
**Long-Term Map Changes**  
**City Ordinances (Non-Zoning)**  
**City Policies**  
**Future Planning Needs**  
**Parking**  
**Circulation**  
**Other Actions and Improvements**

**GOAL 2: Maintain existing patterns of high and medium density housing in and around the downtown.**

**Goal 2 Objectives:**

- 2-1. Preserve the attractiveness and vitality of residential neighborhoods surrounding downtown. Avoid excessive commercial development that could threaten the integrity of these areas and avoid expanding the Central Business District significantly into residential neighborhoods.**
- 2-2. Preserve a range of housing options, including both housing cost and housing type, in the downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods.**

See also objective:

- 1-6: Preserve housing within walking distance of downtown and encouraged mixed uses.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

**Zoning Text Changes**

**Zoning Map Changes**

**Long-Term Map Changes**

**City Ordinances (Non-Zoning)**

**City Policies**

**Future Planning Needs**

**Parking**

**Circulation**

**GOAL 3: Improve commercial buffers and entranceways into downtown to define downtown better.**

**Goal 3 Objectives:**

- 3-1. Expand the Central Business District, when feasible, to encourage low density commercial strips at the edge of downtown to become part of downtown, with a compatible character and compact pedestrian-scale, while preserving residential neighborhoods.**
- 3-2. Encourage pedestrian-scale urban design in downtown's commercial buffers.**
- 3-3. Encourage the landscaping of entryways into downtown and the installation of signage that is compatible with the rest of downtown.**

See also objectives:

- 1-1: Expand the Central Business District.
- 5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.
- 5-2: Better define the character of downtown.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

- Zoning Text Changes**
- Zoning Map Changes**
- Long-Term Map Changes**
- City Ordinances (Non-Zoning)**
- City Policies**
- Future Planning Needs**
- Parking**
- Circulation**

**GOAL 4: Encourage downtown economic expansion, job creation and stability, including locally-grown, non-franchise businesses.**

**Goal 4 Objectives:**

- 4-1. Encourage downtown development of retail and other commercial space with a range of prices (especially in areas with good access to parking).**
- 4-2. Encourage efforts at economic growth, especially those which encourage development and retention of locally-grown businesses.**

See also objectives:

- 1-1: Expand the Central Business District.
- 5-1: Encourage infill development and reuse of buildings.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

- Zoning Text Changes**
- Zoning Map Changes**
- Long-Term Map Changes**
- City Policies**
- Parking**
- Circulation**
- Other Actions and Improvements**

**GOAL 5: Preserve and enhance the character and the amenities that draw people downtown and keep downtown safe and pedestrian friendly.**

**Goal 5 Objectives:**

- 5-1. Encourage infill development and preservation and reuse of historical and architecturally significant buildings**
- 5-2. Better define the character of downtown for the regulatory process and preserve the historic architectural character of downtown.**
- 5-3. Encourage design of new construction in downtown commercial areas to match the existing architectural character of downtown, including building facades, maximum and minimum setbacks, signage and lighting.**
- 5-4. Improve public and private and signage on buildings and public ways so that it is both aesthetic and functional.**
- 5-5. Encourage better use of downtown parks and green space, including pocket parks and corridors of green spaces.**
- 5-6. In partnership with the private sector, maintain or provide downtown amenities such as landscaping, rest rooms, benches, user guides, pay phones, art and information kiosks, bike racks, public art, period streetlights and underground utilities.**
- 5-7. Improve the “walkability” of downtown and reduce walking distances by improving and developing alternative walking routes through alleys and buildings. When possible, walking routes should encourage people to walk downtown and walk within the downtown once they park their cars.**
- 5-8. Continue to encourage downtown cultural events and activities and work with the community to insure that space is available for community and cultural gatherings.**

See also objectives:

- 1-1: Expand the Central Business District.
- 1-5: Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and compatible urban design.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

**Zoning Text Changes**  
**Zoning Map Changes**  
**Long-Term Map Changes**  
**City Ordinances (Non-Zoning)**  
**City Policies**  
**Future Planning Needs**  
**Parking**  
**Circulation**  
**Other Actions and Improvements**

**GOAL 6: Improve circulation system to accommodate development and traffic and to encourage bicycle, pedestrian and transit circulation.**

**Goal 6 Objectives:**

- 6-1. Improve signage, visibility and safety of pedestrian crosswalks and intersections.**
- 6-2. Explore alternative transportation systems such as “park-and-ride” facilities, "free bikes," looped bus service for the downtown, jitneys, improved bike racks, and improved bike paths and bike lanes.**
- 6-3. Review safety and functioning of the New South Street/ Main Street/West Street compound intersection and the New South Street/South Street intersection.**
- 6-4. Examine all future intersection and road improvements in the downtown to determine how they enhance or harm character of downtown and to evaluate these tradeoffs.**
- 6-5. Minimize conflict between pedestrians and cars and minimize pedestrian "dead-spaces" at intersections, crosswalks and parking lots.**

See also objectives:

- 1-5: Encourage pedestrian-scale development patterns and compatible urban design.
- 5-7: Improve the walkability of downtown with better walking routes

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

**Zoning Text Changes**  
**Zoning Map Changes**  
**Long-Term Map Changes**  
**City Policies**  
**Future Planning Needs**  
**Parking**  
**Circulation**  
**Other Actions and Improvements**

**GOAL 7: Ensure that parking is available, accessible and affordable without harming the pedestrian nature of downtown.**

**Goal 7 Objectives:**

- 7-1. Better use of existing parking resources, including private parking areas, to meet needs and continue to work to better inform the public about existing parking.**
- 7-2. Encourage retention and expansion of existing parking facilities (public and private), especially to meet parking demands from new construction and intensification of existing space.**
- 7-3. Begin planning for an eventual second structured parking facility (parking garage or deck) and for additional or expanded surface lots. Public and private entities should locate their parking facilities to serve those areas of the Central Business District with the greatest need, although some surface lots with shared parking for multiple land uses and for all-day parking might be appropriate at the limits of the CBD.**
- 7-4. Expand the Central Business District to encourage new retail and other commercial development in areas with access to municipal parking.**
- 7-5. Maintain and expand parking opportunities off Main Street, to create a sense of abundant parking while avoiding creating dead areas in the flow of pedestrian traffic.**
- 7-6. Encourage development on the periphery of downtown to provide parking without reducing the pedestrian nature of downtown.**
- 7-7. Encourage development patterns that minimize need for additional parking, especially by encouraging foot or bicycle traffic or transit into and around downtown.**
- 7-8. Preserve the density of housing in and within walking distance of downtown. Encourage new downtown mixed residential/ residential development to minimize the need for driving downtown.**
- 7-9. Encourage shared and common parking lots to meet parking needs from multiple land uses, each of which may generate peak parking demands at different times.**

See also objectives:

- 1-5: Encourage pedestrian scale development patterns
- 1-6: Preserve housing within walking distance of downtown and encouraged mixed uses.
- 5-7: Encourage walkability of downtown with better walking routes.

**Actions (see page [44](#))**

**Zoning Text Changes**  
**Long-Term Map Changes**  
**City Policies**  
**Future Planning Needs**  
**Parking**  
**Circulation**



## **ACTION PLAN**

The Planning Board, working with the community through the Downtown Charrette and other public forums, identified a range of actions to implement the goals and objectives identified above. These actions include both regulatory and non-regulatory actions.

Many actions we identified are short and medium term actions. We will need more actions in the future to fully implement the goals and objectives.

## **ZONING TEXT CHANGES**

1. The zoning should continue to encourage limited mixed residential/commercial uses in the Urban Residential-C, but limit those uses and structures to those that add to the vitality of the URC and without detracting from its primary residential character. Except as noted below, the zoning should require that all commercial uses in mixed residential/commercial uses be located on the first floor, except in exceptional circumstances to be determined as part of the special permit process.
2. Encourage mixed residential/commercial development within the Urban Residential-C areas of Gothic Street, Conz Street and possibly some sections of Fruit Street, State Street, Hawley Street and Old South Street. These are areas that should **not** be zoned business, but are well suited for a greater concentration of mixed residential and business uses because the mixed uses will complement the residential component of the neighborhood and the pedestrian nature of downtown and where adequate parking is available nearby. Specifically, using either a distance from municipal parking or a overlay district to define these areas:
  - A. Zoning should allow Home Occupations by-right.
  - B. Zoning should allow Mixed Residential/Commercial Uses by-right in buildings that were standing as of January 1, 1996 and with a special permit in newer construction (site plan thresholds would remain unchanged).
  - C. Zoning should expand the types of businesses allowed to encourage those businesses that are compatible with residential uses, but including businesses that may be higher traffic that would be appropriate in other areas of URC.
  - D. Unlike other areas of the URC, there should be no limits on the percent of commercial space, if there is at least one residential unit per building to retain a residential presence in the area.
3. When using Lot Size Averaging to determine average density, the zoning should exclude those lots which exceed twice the maximum density allowed in the table of dimensional and density regulations. Without this change, some very dense buildings, that do not reflect the median neighborhood density, will otherwise bias the calculations.
4. The zoning should expand city efforts to encourage one story buildings in the downtown to add a second floor and/or third floor, if those floors are in keeping with the character of downtown (through parking requirements).
5. The zoning should clearly allow mixed work/live areas in the central business districts.
6. The zoning should use **maximum** setbacks (build-to line) and **minimum** heights in the Central Business District to encourage new construction to meet the urban character of pedestrian scale of downtown. Maximum setback should be about five feet and minimum heights about 30 feet. The permit granting authority could waive these

- requirements to preserve historical buildings, if the proposed dimensions are at least that of the average of surrounding buildings and to allow for pedestrian malls.
7. Zoning should require landscaping or pedestrian areas in the setback between any new building and the street line (no parking allowed) in the Central Business District.
  8. City Council and the Planning Board should consider reducing the minimum setback to zero, creating a **maximum** setback in the General Business and the Neighborhood Business Districts, and prohibiting parking between any new building and the street to preserve the pedestrian scale. Because this would also effect downtown Florence and other areas of the city, the city should **not adopt** this change without working with Florence residents, business owners and others.
  9. The zoning should remove the dimensional requirements, such as minimum lot size, which serve as a disincentive to mixed residential/commercial development in the Central Business District. Dimensional requirements for mixed use buildings in the CBD should match those for commercial buildings.
  10. The zoning should loosen other dimensional requirements in the Central Business Districts to match the existing pattern of development, reduce the number of nonconforming buildings and lots, and encourage residential uses. In the short term, increase floor area ratio (FAR) requirements in the central business district to 3.0 (Floor Area) to 1 (Lot Area). This action will allow easier conversion of CBD buildings to mixed residential/commercial uses and allow the construction of new buildings at the bulk and density of existing buildings.  
  
In the long term, the zoning could allow for FAR requirement waivers. (The percent of building coverage, percent of open space,
  - maximum building height, rear yard setback and parking requirements effectively limit the FAR to 4.0 to 1.) The zoning should allow waivers of FAR only when a local historic district or other design control body finds that such waivers improve the design of the building.
  11. Zoning should encourage fuller use of the rear of Central Business District buildings by allowing a zero rear-yard setback requirement in CB when the rear yard abuts up to a road, public way or alley with safe public access.
  12. Zoning should encourage buildings to be built up to the front yard setback in the Highway Business District, including King Street, to match those in General Business. To do this, the zoning should reduce minimum front setbacks, prohibit parking in front of the setback line (except for gas station uses) and provide bonus densities for uses with parking behind the building.
  13. Zoning should encourage limited mixed uses, arts and crafts manufacturing and other compatible uses in the special industrial district. It should also allow mixed work/live spaces (a variation on home occupations), in historic buildings in special industrial zones **when** the work space is at least 80 percent of the building's floor space and at least 50 percent of each work/live space unit. Housing should **not** be allowed that is not part of a work space. Because this recommendation would effect areas of Northampton other than the downtown, the city should **not** adopt this without working with Florence and Leeds residents, business owners and other affected people.
  14. The zoning should provide incentives for reuse of Central Business District properties damaged by fire or other causes in two ways. First, allow reconstruction of a building if the reconstruction goes through a design review process. Second, adopt the dimensional changes already discussed above.

15. The zoning should clarify the special permit criteria for allowing payment-in-lieu of parking in the Central Business District. Zoning should allow payment-in-lieu if parking is likely to be adequate for the new use. The zoning should also allow the city to use fees collected for any capital investment that adds new parking spaces, improves the utilization of existing spaces, or reduces the need for new parking, including measures which makes shortens perceived walking distances in the downtown.
16. The zoning should allow off-site parking to be up to 1,000 feet from a principal land use (currently the maximum is 500 feet) if:
  - A. The off-site parking will be shared by more than one land use; and
  - B. The greater distance is justified because of pedestrian traffic patterns and the vitality of the area that would be part of the walk.
17. The city should correct discrepancies and inconsistencies in the dimensional requirements of the zoning. It should also clarify unclear zoning language, including the definitions of frontage/lot frontage and abandonment/discontinuance.
18. The zoning should allow festive banners to hang from downtown city streetlights for special events. This could also apply to Florence, if residents and businesses there are interested.
19. The zoning should allow temporary signs and banners for any new business for its first six months. This would help give new businesses name recognition without creating an overabundance of signs.
20. Zoning should increase the signage allowed on side walls in the CBD to match that allowed on main wall signs, **if** the side walls face a city street. This could allow a greater vibrancy on side streets without detracting from the visual appearance.
21. The zoning should encourage service clubs and the Chamber of Commerce to install welcoming signs at the gateways to Northampton, instead of the city corporate boundary, with all signs consolidated in one well-maintained display. Hopefully, one lead organization would maintain the signs.
22. The city should reevaluate sandwich board signs downtown to solve circulation and aesthetic issues and to maintain adequate signage of businesses on side streets. The demand for Main Street advertising will continue to grow as more businesses locate on side streets. Sandwich board signs serve an important role in downtown and should remain.
23. Public art, as defined in the Public Art Plan, that meets specific design standards should be exempt from any future zoning, design review or historic district ordinance, except art with municipal funding or on municipal facilities.

## ZONING MAP CHANGES

The proposed map changes are shown on the attached "Downtown Northampton Regulatory Action Plan" map.

1. Significantly expand the Central Business District, primarily in areas previously zoned General or Neighborhood Business. This expansion will provide:
  - A. Area for commercial expansion without creating strip development or losing downtown housing; **and**
  - B. An incentive for developing Northampton's commercial "gateways" to preserve and expand the character of downtown.
  - C. An opportunity for greater utilization of existing parking lots (public and private) and for the potential for more shared parking.
  - D. Encouragement to use and reuse historical buildings.
  - E. Very limited stress on the city's parking system.

2. Do **not** expand the Central Business District in areas which would create more stress on the city's parking system, including the east side of Market Street. Do not expand the CBD in areas which would threaten downtown housing, including the east side of Market and any additional parcels on Gothic Street (See Market Street discussion under paragraph 2 in long-term map changes and Gothic Street discussion under paragraph 2 in zoning text changes.)
2. Change the General Business District on Clark Avenue to Urban Residential-C, in keeping with this area's character (which has been built-out as a residential area).
3. Expand the Neighborhood Business District on Conz Street to reflect current usage that is consistent with this plan by providing for some slight intensification of commercial services at the edge of downtown.
4. Rezone General Industrial zone on West Street to Special Industrial zone to allow mixed uses that complement downtown and the West Street neighborhood.
5. Better define unclear zoning boundaries.

## LONG-TERM MAP CHANGES

The attached "Downtown Northampton Areas of Possible Future Expansion" map shows the proposed changes. This map is for illustrative purposes and the city would clearly need to reevaluate these recommendations before any zoning change is considered.

1. Expand the Central Business District on Pleasant Street south to Holyoke Street if, and only if, a municipal parking facility or private shared parking facility is developed within a short walk of this area. This expansion would encourage future growth of commercial space at the Central Business District/pedestrian scale.
2. After several years of monitoring and evaluating the results of rezoning the west side of Market Street, the Planning Board

should reexamine whether the east side, between Graves and Bridge should be rezoned CBD.

3. Eventually, the city could expand the boundaries of the Central Business District and other commercial zoning districts to allow for future growth of pedestrian-scale commercial areas. This expansion should be done to continue to encourage appropriate commercial development in the downtown instead of along the King Street strip or in areas that are currently undeveloped.

In particular, in the future the city should consider further Central Business District or other business district expansions on Pleasant Street and Gothic Street **if**:

- A. There are adequate and nearby shared parking facilities; and
- B. Downtown continues to grow, creating a need for more space; and
- C. Expansion will encourage compact and pedestrian scale development.
- D. Expansion will not threaten residential neighborhoods.

## CITY ORDINANCES (NON-ZONING)

1. Consider ordinance changes, if any, to implement the recommendations of the downtown historic district study committee (currently under study). Recommendations could include any one of several tools to preserve the historic and architectural character of downtown.
2. The city should work with the Northampton Arts Council, revive Northampton's design review committee or use another equivalent committee to evaluate exterior construction and art on city-owned or used properties.

## CITY POLICIES

1. The city should work with the Downtown Business Division and local phone companies to improve the availability of public telephones. There have been past discussions on placing phones by City Hall and at the corner of Gothic Street and Main

- Street (near the bus shelter).
2. Electric, phone and cable utilities should be buried, when economical and feasible when the City reconstructs streets in the Central Business District and the entryways to the Central Business District.
  3. The City Hall restrooms should be available to the public during the hours that there is a janitor on duty in the City Hall/Municipal Building Complex. New municipal facilities, such as the future new police station and any future parking garage, should incorporate restrooms for public use.
  4. The city should continue to allow street musicians and a vibrant street life.
  5. Generally, existing downtown public facilities should maintained or replaced in the downtown.
  6. If the city does not build a new fire station on the site of the existing station, the city should sell the site with priority for users:
    - A. Who will maintain the historic building, with the city holding a preservation restriction on the property; and
    - B. Second priority , if the building can not be reused, for users who will intensely develop the site, with a building built to the Masonic Street line.
  7. The city should work to insure that skateboarders have a legal place to skate.
  8. The city should continue to encourage, and sometimes help, in efforts of the Downtown Business Division of the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce and the Hospitality Association to market the downtown.
  9. The city, using federal Community Development Block Grant funds and staff time, should continue to work with banks, the Valley Community Development Corporation, the Community Trust, the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center, the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce, and others to help small business development. In particular, the city should expand efforts to encourage tenants for vacant space above store fronts and to provide micro-loans for new businesses.
  10. The city should continue to pursue tax-title auctions for **unused properties** in the downtown that are not paying taxes to get them back into active use.
  11. The city should determine the ownership of the green areas that are now or formerly within the Main Street street layout, especially the area in front of the granite wall at the First Churches and Fleet Bank (109 and 129 Main Street). (This research may be a difficult process.) If the land is publicly owned, it could be used for a park and/or public art space (see below).
  12. The city should work to insure adequate clear pedestrian and wheelchair circulation after winter storms. Specifically:
    - A. The City, the honor court, abutting landowners, volunteers, or a downtown improvement district should maintain sidewalk curb ramps for winter accessibility by removing snow from curbs.
    - B. Merchants and landowners, including the city for Pulaski Park and Memorial Hall, should remove snow and ice in front of their properties. (In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Ordinances §19-19.)
  13. The city should strongly encourage the Massachusetts Highway Department to place an informational sign on Interstate 91 about services and visitor facilities in Northampton.

## FUTURE PLANNING NEEDS

1. Conduct a downtown historic district study (study committee created 1995, partially as a result of downtown Charrette ) to:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>A. Better identify downtown's historic and architectural character; and</p> <p>B. Evaluate the appropriateness of a local historic district or other tools to preserve downtown's character.</p>   | <p>create dead, low-interest areas for pedestrians, ugly seas of asphalt, and discourage people from walking to and within the downtown.</p>   |
| <p>3. Consider a demolition delay ordinance for historic buildings that other city ordinances will not protect only after the historic district study committee issues their final report.</p>  | <p>2. The city should update previous detailed parking demand and supply studies to determine parking needs, plan for future facilities, and assist private efforts for parking facilities. Include downtown residents and workers and the high density neighborhoods immediately surrounding downtown.</p>  |
| <p>3. The Planning Board should address design review, signage, landscaping and other issues in a strategic plan for Northampton's gateways. The Board should consider whether new structures and major renovations within the central business district and the "gateways" into downtown that are not part of a historic district should be subject to design review by the Planning Board or another board to preserve the character of downtown.</p> | <p>3. Early planning, site identification and examination of funding for an eventual, second structured parking facility (parking garage or deck) should begin now. A structured facility should be placed so that it serves development in all directions, i.e., is not placed at the edge of the restaurant and shopping areas of downtown. A parking structure will almost certainly be placed in an area that is currently parking (municipal, county or private). Planning efforts should also examine the potential for surface lots, which could be located closer to the edge of downtown. City efforts should continue, however, to encourage private enterprise to meet parking needs.</p> |
| <p>4. The city should continue an ongoing review of public and private signage and regulations to insure that downtown street signage is clear and that parking facilities are well marked. Signs should not detract from the appearance of downtown, its surrounding neighborhoods and its entryways. Most comments the city receives about inappropriate signage relate to awnings, signage lighting and to signage along King Street.</p>            | <p>4. The Parking Commission or private entities should attempt to develop surface parking lots in areas where there is or will be parking demand, especially on the fringes of downtown such as Pleasant Street.</p>  |
| <p>5. The Office of Planning and Development should prepare a long-term plan for open space and non-vehicular circulation in and through the downtown. The plan should show existing and possible future pocket parks, rail trail expansions and street landscaping that would complement and strengthen the city's open space and recreation planning efforts and provide connections for rail trails.</p>   | <p>5. The Parking Commission and the city should continue to encourage long-term employee and resident parking at parking lots on the edge of the Central Business District through their rate structure and availability of monthly parking rates.</p>  |
|   | <p>6. All new road projects should minimize the loss of on-street parking spaces and, ideally, create new on-street spaces. Short-term on-street spaces are in very short supply and are critical for certain types of downtown businesses.</p>  |

## PARKING

1. Avoid creating excessive parking lots that

7. The city should continue to encourage downtown residents to walk or bicycle downtown to avoid the need for parking (see circulation recommendations). The city, especially the Parking Commission, should continue periodically to examine everything from parking rates and parking availability to city employee parking privileges.

## CIRCULATION

1. The planned reconstruction and signalization of the Old South Street/New South Street (Rt. 10) intersection is critical to safely moving vehicles and pedestrians into and out of the downtown. This project will reduce a major barrier to downtown.
2. Improving the compound Main Street/New South Street/State Street/West Street/Elm Street intersection is also critical for smooth circulation and to end a major barrier to downtown. This intersection is far more complex and more difficult to improve.
3. The planned installation of traffic signals at Exit 18 on Interstate 91 and a turning lane on Pleasant Street at Main Street will ease traffic flow in and around downtown.
4. The Department of Public Works should continue to maintain the existing widening of the sidewalk on Pleasant Street at Hampden Avenue to preserve pedestrian safety and a pedestrian scale, in spite of some disadvantages for public works.
5. The Department of Public Works should investigate improving the marking and/or signage of many Main Street and Central Business District crosswalks to identify crosswalks for drivers better. DPW and City Council should investigate installing audible signals at both signalized Main Street intersections.
6. The Department of Environmental Management or the city, using state and federal transportation funds, should improve bicycle and pedestrian access to and from downtown by constructing a rail trail from

- the Roundhouse parking lot to West Street, Easthampton and Southampton.
7. The city should work to develop a recreational rail trail on the old railroad bed from the Roundhouse parking lot to Easthampton and Southampton. This project could be funded with state and federal funds and done in cooperation with Easthampton, Southampton and possibly the Department of Environmental Management. The city should lay out the trail to allow for an eventual shared use of the railroad bed with a road as far as West Street and then a dedicated rail trail to Easthampton.
8. The city should mark a bicycle route along State Street to connect downtown with the Northampton Bike Path.
9. Once the Norwottuck Rail Trail Extension is complete, the city should mark a bicycle route from the end of the Norwottuck Rail Trail Extension at Woodmont Avenue to downtown (possibly via the end of the Northampton Bike Path)
10. When practicable, DPW should cut wheelchair ramps at crosswalk curbs without them. Specifically, the sidewalks need cuts at the New South Street crossing south of the Academy of Music.
11. The city should develop a Park-and-Ride facility to reduce the number of cars in downtown and/or reduce the driving done by residents of downtown and Northampton.
12. The city should evaluate the need and impacts of developing a new road from Old South Street to West Street, using the former railroad bed. This road could relieve pressure on the Main Street/West Street/New South Street intersections. Any evaluation should look at the potential impacts on streets, pedestrian traffic flow, residential neighborhoods and green space. (The road would share its right-of-way with rail-trail described above.)

13. The city should set a high priority on implementing measures that improve pedestrian circulation, shorten the walking distance between source and destination points within the downtown and reduce the need for new parking spaces, including:
  - A. Improved public and private lighting and signage in alley ways that connect streets and parking lots; and
  - B. Public access through more of the stores with frontage on Main Street and the Armory Street parking lot to provide through access; and
  - C. The extension of the pedestrian tunnel from Strong Avenue to the Depot Restaurant to the east side of the railroad, with a path continuing up to Hawley Street.
  - D. Commercial activity in alleys and tunnels, to make the areas more lively and safe.
14. The city should work with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to improve transit in and to the downtown. Specifically the city should support:
  - A. The creation of a bus stop on Main Street near Thornes Market for all buses passing by that location; and
  - B. An improved bus transfer stop by the Academy of Music or elsewhere in the downtown.
15. Public and private landowners should install improved and additional bicycle racks at convenient locations in the downtown. Bicycle racks that allow tires and bike frame to be locked with just one lock are the most effective.
16. When possible, the city should encourage the building and business owners to provide access for their customers and the public from the Armory Street Parking Lot to Main Street.

## OTHER ACTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS:

1. The city should continue ongoing efforts to maintain old street lights and should use similar styled period lights when they are replacing lights within the pedestrian core area of the Central Business District.
2. The city should continue to work with the Honor Court, the Downtown Business Division and other volunteers to insure that streets and public areas are clean and that trash barrels and benches are maintained and replaced as needed.
3. The city should install a "Downtown Shopping and Restaurant District, \_\_\_\_ miles" at the highway entrances to Northampton (southbound side of King Street near Damon Rd/Bridge Rd., northbound side of Pleasant Street near the dike, and westbound side of Bridge Street near Damon Road).
4. The Northampton Arts Council, working with the Department of Public Works, should develop a downtown public art/ art kiosk and public art.
5. The city or the Downtown Business Division of the Chamber of Commerce should provide an outdoor information kiosk for tourists and local visitors with space for posters and notices, either as part of above park or as a separate facility. This would complement the Chamber's information booth.
6. The city should improve signage for downtown parks, recreation areas and quasi-public spaces and shown these areas on maps of the downtown.
7. The Recreation Commission should work with the abutters of the Nagle Downtown Walkway park on Pleasant Street, by the Depot parking lot, to make the park more attractive and better used.
8. The city and the arts' community should



continue to work together to insure adequate community meeting places for cultural and community events.

9. Downtown building owners and merchants could create a Downtown Improvement District if they felt that more funding is needed to maintain improvements to the streetscape or other eligible expenditures.

## **APPENDIX**

### **CHARRETTE**

As part of their attempt to encourage extensive public participation, the Northampton Planning Board sponsored a downtown interactive workshop, or a charrette in November 1994. 150 residents, business and building owners and citizens participated in the Downtown Charrette. They identified downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

### **CHARRETTE: DOWNTOWN STRENGTHS**

*Items in bold are those that many participants identified as very important. Other items may not represent any consensus and may be one person's ideas.*

Participants identified downtown's strengths as:

**Arts Community & cultural opportunities**  
**Arts, Pottery, music, theater, fine arts**  
**Cleanliness (Honor Court)**  
 Proximity to rural areas and views  
**Safety - pedestrian and general (related to street life, mixed residential/business uses, bike police and lighting)**  
**Economic, Social & Cultural Vitality**  
 Economically Successful  
 Town-Vibrant, Coherent  
**Mixed uses and diversity of uses, including commercial and residential mix, live and work space**  
**Architecture & architectural Integrity & Cohesiveness**  
 Historic Designation & Setting

### **Human or village scale ( intimate)**

Lots of Receptive Spaces - "Living Room"  
 Community Attitude & Spirit  
 Residential areas surrounding downtown and residences on downtown's upper floors  
Local Businesses, not like the rest of the country  
 Gay/Lesbian Community  
 Creativity

### **People & the Human Element**

Parking Garage  
 Accessibility (including access to I-91)  
 Modes of Transit, including Mass Transportation  
 Commercial Basement Space  
 Police Station Location  
 Modes of Lighting

### **Pedestrian friendly - good crosswalks**

**Small-business friendly (mixed uses and opportunities and new businesses)**

### **Compactness, short walking distances, density**

Infrastructure in good shape  
 Smith college, linked to, but not dominated by five colleges

### **Institutions - number/variety**

**Economic diversity and mix of services**  
**Local and eclectic business & entrepreneurs**  
**Downtown housing and committed residents**  
**Aesthetics, physical and environmental, including design quality**

### **Streets promote intimacy and sociability**

**Shops and restaurants (quality, diversity, serves as destinations for a wide area)**

### **Thorne's Market- incubator, multi-level access**

**Diversity of people and business**  
**Open Mindedness & Acceptance of Diversity**

### **Government/Retail/Arts/Academia**

**Business-government cooperation**

**Political access to effect change and accountability**

**Open Spaces, Vest Pocket Parks, Pulaski Park (and its tot lot)**

**Vibrant Main Street, street activity at all hours**

**Diversity of streetscape (related to safety & mixed uses)**

Vacancies

**Strong community identity, community and civic concern and commitment of citizens and local businesses**

Availability of outlying land parcels to improve

Intensity and Fun

Physical size, setting and presence

Variety on approach, unique and special upon entering

Inclusive not Exclusive

Flow is Organic with human & physical permeable membrane

Reflection of Interests: academic, artistic, diversity, history

Wide variety of stuff to do-all ages appeal

"Pockets" of downtown, find your place

Advantages of big city in small town setting

Physically: Not a grid - curve of Main Street

Draw of the downtown and reputation

Diversity of spaces & buildings

## **CHARRETTE: DOWNTOWN WEAKNESSES**

*Items in bold are those that many participants identified as very important. Other items may not represent any consensus and may be one person's ideas.*

Participants identified downtown's weaknesses as:

**Commercial/residential conflict, especially on side streets (including parking, noise, litter and lighting)**

**Youth appropriate space and activities (including skateboarding, a teen center)**

**Lack of access and commercial services for elders**

**Traffic and congestion, especially Main Street**

Limited mass transit

Inhospitality toward youth in stores

**Tourist appeal vs. needs of whole community (alienation)**

**Limited Local Services for Residents & basic commercial uses (e.g., screwdrivers)**

**Linkage weaknesses, especially with King Street**

**Conflicts for open space between green areas and cars (lack of design, shortage of space)**

Cultural alienation

Anxiety about safety - (especially in evening)

Parking for bicycles

Rapid unplanned growth - parking and safety

**Upscale and expensive (boutique)- not serving all needs and losing appeal for many Northampton residents**

Link between commercial and residential areas

Lack of public space and inefficient use of space, including Pulaski Park

Lack of adequate signage standards (style & wattage) and poor signage quality

Cultural and lifestyle segregation

**Affordability of commercial and residential space (gentrification)**

**Lack of public facilities (phones, rest rooms)**

Lack of public gathering space

Lack of affordable housing, gentrification (including loss of single room occupancy hotels and inexpensive rentals, residents being dislocated from downtown)

Lighting Intrusions (some commercial lighting)

Landlord accountability

Lack of cultural, racial and economic diversity

**Parking for residents & others, parking tickets, short term parking needs**

St. Hospital closing & V.A. no follow-up services

Pleasant and King Street entrances to downtown lack a transition to strip development

Crosswalk safety

Zoning restrictions on business

Condition of alleys and their underuse

Dumpsters in parking lots

Chain stores and franchises moving in

Hanging out - including at Pulaski Park

**Lack of historic preservation**

Psychological barriers to downtown physical (e.g., topography, intersections, parking)

**Lack of public water fountains, restrooms,**

**amenities, including bus shelters, information, public phones**

	a	
	n	
	d	<i>Items in bold are those that many participants identified as very important. Other items may not represent any consensus and may be one person's ideas.</i>
	o	
	t	
	h	
	e	Participants identified opportunities for downtown as:
	r	
	s	
	m	<b>More structured parking near Registry of Deeds or Strong Avenue</b>
	a	Use existing parking lots more creatively
	l	Coordination of residential and commercial parking
	l	Increase accessibility to second & third floor spaces
	a	Parking next to garage: extend Main Street stores to create terrace on top, and connect Main St. to Armory Street lot through an archway
	m	Encourage further commercial and residential development in the Pleasant, Conz and Holyoke Street areas
	e	Create walkway/greenway to Veterans Field, with skateboarding, pedestrian and bicycle connections
	n	Skating and/or skateboarding near the Parking Garage/Thornes skyway
	i	<b>Plan the future of downtown to include adjacent neighborhoods - Pleasant St., King St., Green St. (link to downtown)</b>
	t	<b>Public awareness (walking tours, historic districts, and tourist information)</b>
	i	<b>Improvement of public space (including Armory Street parking lot, Pulaski Park, Courthouse Lawn)</b>
	e	Intersections/Traffic Flow - Alley use
	s	Crosswalk textures
Noisy for residents (including street musicians), especially at night		Improvements - coordinate for accessibility, aesthetics
Potential for "outsiders" overload		Social - diversity
Dangerous and inconvenient traffic and pedestrian mix, jaywalkers		Expanded operating hours
Signs often not visible enough and confusing street signs		<b>Opportunities for youth (including for skating, skateboarding and indoor recreation spaces), but not segregated from downtown activity</b>
Downtown residents - invisibility & alienation		Encourage residential development, especially in the downtown, without sacrificing design (use regulatory tools)
Trash problems (including dumping by residents, dirt & litter in winter, full trash cans)		<b>Community Spaces (People's Inst., Fire Station. Lot, Calvin Theater, alleys, rest rooms)</b>
Inadequate access for off-road deliveries		Vertical Development - (second layer downtown) -
Drugs on streets and street crime, deterioration public safety and public services		Develop rear of Main Street buildings (especially on Armory Street side)
No cohesiveness of downtown residents		
Perceived attitude of old Northampton versus new Northampton		
Lack of balance to types of businesses		
Lack of integration with side streets - flow, visually, traffic		
Too much activity concentrated on Main St.		
Lack of seating (not intimate, more benches)		
Inaccessibility of Roundhouse parking lot		
Lack of lighting from peripheral, parking areas		
More attention to creation of pathways - Hawley, Market St.		
<b><u>CHARRETTE: DOWNTOWN OPPORTUNITIES</u></b>		

Connect downtown buildings to share accessibility & basements  
 Improvement of airport and railroad, connect to downtown  
 Labor market  
 Tri-County Fairground utilization - tourist and community Use for four seasons  
 National Felt Co., reuse of abandoned spaces  
 Connecting the elderly with downtown's resources  
 Opportunity to carefully control development of second layer (e.g., Market Street, Trumbull)  
 Attract new business (e.g., publishing)  
**Underutilized spaces - year-round park space, downtown periphery, historic utilization, river and Meadows access, bikeway**  
**Americans with Disabilities Act**  
**Human potential: labor market/skills**  
**Intergenerational and multi-cultural opportunities**  
 Foster renovation and preservation: taxes, technical assistance  
 Edge neighborhoods: residential potential with some slight commercial expansion  
 Limited industrial space for high technology  
 Infill development  
 Plaza - Hampton Ave/Armory  
Neighborhoods - design, use, amenities, social life (e.g., Green St.)  
 Public support of Center for Arts and for public art  
 Community transportation, Improved public transit throughout town, including King Street  
 Work with Smith College in community activities and housing  
**Opportunity for larger public/farmers market (with connection for local farms)**  
**Redefine transportation system: pedestrian, vehicular, bicycle, parking, "holistic" approach, "satellite" parking, shuttle buses**  
**Intensification and reuse of building spaces: Calvin, Police Station, Fire Station, National Felt, State Hospital, State Hospital, C.F.A., Academy, SIS parking lot**  
 Support existing businesses  
 Use additional parking to direct future growth  
 Safety and community-oriented policing, police bike patrol, partnership with citizens  
 Plan for economic diversity  
 Preserve residential ring around downtown  
 Create smaller apartments (less expensive) combined with service and commercial some light industrial  
 Promote cheaper space on outskirts

**Entrance/gateway to city enhancement: wise use of King St., Pleasant St. and Bridge St. for attractive residential and commercial uses**  
**Regional Center: HUB for government, commerce, improve connections**  
**Downtown pockets**  
 King St. - linkages, parking, neighborhoods off King/linkage with residences  
 Identify environmental quality priorities  
**"Second Downtown" - Armory Street behind Main St. without cars: - "Taste" space, - Village square**  
 Design standards for pedestrian friendliness  
 Sense of community: lower King St./regulate to encourage this  
**More Charrettes, public input & decisions, more community involvement for residents, public forums**  
 Local services provided in "secondary spaces" with lower rents  
 Use of side streets - outdoor Thornes  
 Need for more intimate spaces  
 Creative Reuse of municipal buildings/lands to encourage small scale uses  
 Exploit underused space in basements facing parking lots -  
 Spaces within walking linked to downtown  
 Neighborhood business incentives  
 Arrange setbacks of King St. more like downtown  
 Maximize indoor and outdoor community meeting space  
 Bicycle and non-vehicle access to downtown - bike and pedestrian paths, riverways, bike parking, bike route continuation  
 Second homeless shelter  
 Northampton State Hospital Redevelopment  
 Maximize green space: e.g., Courthouse lawn  
 Tourist hospitality - more rooms  
**Historic Preservation District: prevent or delay demolition**  
**Design controls with financial and technical assistance; avoid over-regulation**  
**Arts and crafts festivals and events, use to foster community**  
**Social: community advice, assistance, visitor info. center**  
 Use of People's Inst. for community space (youth/elderly)  
 Roundhouse parking lot  
 Reinforce Courthouse/King St. crosswalk  
 Alley enhancement (e.g., lighting)

Public rest rooms  
Social service agency assistance

## **CHARRETTE: DOWNTOWN THREATS**

*Items in bold are those that many participants identified as very important. Other items may not represent any consensus and may be one person's ideas.*

Participants identified threats to downtown as:

**Physical development: over planning; edges, risk of critical buildings being run down or demolished**

**Limited affordable housing**

**Elderly's needs not met**

**Social: complacency - losing involvement**

**Integrating new population**

**State Hospital Redevelopment including inadequate infrastructure & traffic flow**

**National chains and franchises downtown dislocating local businesses, homogeneity and out-competing**

**National chains, franchises, "big-box" retailers and even casinos outside downtown out-competing downtown**

Character of King St. - cars

\$ of downtown space to mixes of uses

**Deterioration in safety, drug traffic, crime, gangs, racism**

Noise (sirens, people, musicians)

Closure of pedestrian walkways and barriers to pedestrian access

Fragility of mix of downtown users

Override of local control (by state government, out-of-town interests, including state purchase of buildings)

Hispanic community - failure to include

Blindness about what diversity can be (are we really diverse?)

Lack of regional perspective/threat of being isolated

Outgrowing infrastructure

Threat of location and type of stores

Potential shift of institutions, especially the courthouse, away from downtown (loss of service agencies & lawyers' offices)

Loss of Airport

Bypass

Traffic-noise: threats to residential streets, truck

traffic, risk to downtown liveability

**Potential loss of parking - Courthouse/ King Street area**

Boutiquey, gentrification - goods too expensive and not serving local needs

Demographic change conflict

Economic decline in other communities

Urbanization up Interstate 91

Centralization government resources

Retaining architectural size limits (as limit to chains)

Engineering and public works, misdirections

Edges--poor condition, expensive, run down

Losing commercial diversity

Lighting

Old versus new residents

**Difficult to integrate youth into mainstream**

**Running out of parking**

**Parking treated as profit center by city**

**Loss of Calvin Theater**

**Commercial rents too high, spaces too small, therefore higher prices**

Maintain balance between human and environmental needs

Architectural integrity of built environment: inadequate protection; demolition, alteration; loss of aesthetic appeal

Threatened sense of place

Smith College Purchases of Green Street "buffer properties"

King St. vacant lots: next Wal-Mart?

Loss of political support of those who do not live in downtown, polarity loss of support

Potential abuse by visitors of streets, private homes and lawns

Preserve second floor residential spaces

Threats to community arts/gathering indoor spaces (Calvin, Academy, Center for Arts, Pleasant St. Theater)

Traffic/cars/parking

Downtown sprawl

Alienation of more citizens

**Increased paving**

Over popularity (supply and demand escalates prices and rents and brings in franchises and chains)

Loss of Affordable and Market-rate Housing with gentrification displacing residents

Highway pedestrian conflicts and general traffic concerns

Over-regulation: zoning, smoking ban, design controls, skateboarding

Loss of mixed use

**Lack of design guidelines, historic preservation**

**Potential loss of local-serving businesses**

Disenfranchised groups (youth & elderly, medium income)

Damage to entryways to downtown

## **CHARRETTE: ACTIONS**

In the Downtown Charrette, workshop participants identified the following actions as for the city to take. The participants listed items as those that should occur in the short term (less than two years), medium term (two to five years) and long term (five years or more).

*\*\*\*This marks actions that reflect a wide consensus among Charrette participants of different backgrounds*

*\* This marks actions from the Charrette brainstorming process. There may be very limited support for these actions.*

*>>This marks ideas and from public meetings and planning board discussions.*

## **Parking Issues**

\*Open Municipal Building elevator from Roundhouse lot to Main St. 24 hours/day (short term)

\*Long term parking for residents (especially winter) (short term)

\*Parking in underutilized spaces in existing lots (short term)

\*Peripheral parking with shuttle (medium to long term)

\*Get rid of night charges at parking garage (short term)

**\*\*\*Increase parking options to allow downtown development with minimum impact (medium and long term)**

**\*\*\*Build second structured parking garage by Registry of Deeds or Strong Ave. (long term)**

\*More short term parking on Main St. (short term)

>>Improved use of alleys, with signage and better lighting, could shorten the effective walking distance from shops and restaurants to cars, and make downtown easier to walk.

>>Improved use of private and county parking lots at night could solve part of the evening parking shortage in the downtown.

## **Transportation and Circulation**

**\*\*\*Crosswalks (as part of Route 9 repaving) with different texture than the road, as part of the 1995 repaving of Route 9, especially Main St. at King St., at Pleasant St. and at South St. (short term)**

**\*\*\*Jitneys, trains and other transit alternatives, including improved King St-Main St link (long term)**

**\*\*\*Improve pedestrian safety (short to long term)**

**\*\*\*Bike racks (short term)**

\*Slow traffic Main from King Street to South Street (short term)

\*Examine traffic flows to Northampton State Hospital to insure traffic or road improvements will not damage downtown or its neighborhoods, including bypasses (medium term)

**\*\*\*Long Term Transportation planning and analysis (holistic) to examine all modes of circulation and alternatives, including motor vehicle trip reductions and minimizing paved areas (long term)**

**\*\*\*Encourage bicycle use, extend bikepaths to downtown (medium to long term)**

**\*\*\*Traffic flow and street signage improvements (medium term)**

**\*\*\*Develop better linkages between public and recreational spaces, especially a rail trail for pedestrians, skateboards and bicycles from downtown to Veterans Field (medium term)**

**\*\*\*Better snow removal of downtown walkways, especially at curb-wheel chair ramps (medium term)**

>>Road improvements can be carefully reviewed to insure that they will not unduly reduce short term street parking or increase traffic and create barriers to pedestrian movements.

>>A recreational rail trail should be built from West Street into Northampton on the old rail bed.

>>A road, recreational rail trail or a combination of road and rail trail could be built from the Roundhouse parking lot to West Street, to improve bicycle and pedestrian linkages and reduce Main Street/New South Street/West Street traffic. A road could have adverse impacts on the local neighborhoods if not well designed to insure the road does not create a barrier to pedestrian movement.

## **Improve Streetscape Amenities**

- \*\*\*Public phones (short term)
- \*\*\*Information kiosks (medium term)
- \*\*\*Visitors Center, downtown tours and city information guide (medium term)
- \*\*\*Water fountains (long term)
- \*\*\*Rest rooms (long term)
- \*\*\*Trash receptacles (short term)
- \*\*\*Improved trash pickup (short term)
- \*\*\*Benches (short term)
- \*\*\*Pocket parks and street furniture (long term)
- \*\*\*Improved Bus shelter (long term)
- \*\*\*Street lighting (long term)
- \*Utilities underground (long term)
- \*\*\*Expand farmers market (short term)
- \*Trees, landscaped buffers and tree maintenance (short and medium term)
- \*Improve alleys and short cuts (short to medium term)
- \*\*\*Expand and improve public cultural and recreational facilities (medium term)
- \*Look into running Calvin as trust like Academy (medium term)
- \*Address skateboard park, possibly under parking garage skyway (medium term)
- \*Direct linkage Main St.-Armory (medium term)
- \*Redesign Pulaski Park & Memorial Hall area to make it more hospitable (medium term)
- \*Find space for musicians to practice (medium term)
- \*\*\*Greenbelt-Old Mill River to Pleasant St. to Conz St. & around downtown (long term)
- \*\*\*Create environmental plan addressing downtown linkages and linkages to preserved agricultural areas (medium term)
- \*Outdoor swimming area at Elwell Island (long term)
- \*Teen and youth facilities, space and services (short to long term)
- \*\*\*City and community support for Center for the Arts (medium term)
- >>Temporary banners, especially from streetlights, to promote festive occasions (but banners should not be overused)
- >>Signs near the interstate exits to make visitors aware that Northampton has a downtown shopping and restaurant area.
- >>The area in front of Fleet Bank (109 Main Street) could be made into a pocket park/public art space, assuming the land is city owned, as shown on the Assessors' maps.

## Historic Districts and Design Review

- \*\*\*Preserve historic, architectural, design and

- aesthetic qualities of downtown, especially Main Street (short to long term)
- \*\*\*Local historic district (medium term)
- \*\*\*Zoning for design review (medium term)
- \*\*\*Design or architectural review & approval (medium to long term)
- \*\*\*Demolition delay ordinance (medium term)
- \*Design guidelines, including for pedestrian enhancement (medium to long term)
- \*Develop design guidelines for adaptive reuse (short term)
- \*Educate Public About Downtown - Visual Literacy (medium term)
- >>A combination of zoning and local historic districts could be used to protect the fabric of downtown, while only regulating those building demolitions, new construction and alterations that would irreparably damage downtown. Regulations can be as loose or as strict as the community wants them to be.

## Land Use

- \*\*\*Re-zone King & Pleasant to encourage mixed-use and hide cars (long term)
- \*\*\*Creative use back of north and south side of Main St., and shared entrances for improved accessibility (long term)
- \*Encourage coordinated development of downtown upper floors (long term)
- \*Expand area of mixed use slightly beyond the central business district (short term)
- \*Zoning of edges of downtown to meet community goals (medium term)
- \*\*\*Improve visual gateways to downtown, especially King Street and Pleasant Street, and provide a better linkage to downtown (medium to long term)
- \*\*\*Develop & use regulatory tools to encourage residential development (medium term)
- \*Develop Armory St. lot for more pedestrian space with expanded retail & possibly skating rink (long term)
- \*Encourage more small retail spaces (medium term)
- \*\*\*Encourage infill development and reevaluate incentives and disincentives to increased density (medium term)
- \*\*\*Revise zoning to discourage national chains and encourage mixed uses (medium term)
- \*\*\*Provide more housing and affordable housing opportunities (medium and long term)
- \*\*\*Encourage reuse of strategic buildings and areas

and soon to be unused municipal buildings, including Calvin, SIS parking lot, National Felt Company, police station and fire station (medium to long term)

\*Define downtown geographically to build identity (short term)

\*\*\***Make alleys more alive and useable (medium term)**

\*\*\***Noise ordinance revision and enforcement (short term)**

>>Protect residential neighborhoods against undue commercial development while still encouraging mixed use. For example, a standard that allows commercial uses in urban residential-C areas, but only in buildings that are at least 60% residential.

>>Encourage residential uses in the central business district or a newly expanded central business district by dimensional or parking bonuses.

>>To encourage reuse of the former National Felt Building while still preserving our industrial base, mixed work/live space or residential space not to exceed a small percent (30%) of the building could be allowed. This could apply to all industrial buildings in the special industrial zone (and rezone the building) or to historical buildings in general industrial zone. (Because this would also effect Florence, Bay State and Leeds, residents there need to be involved in discussions.)

>>There should be a clearer goal as to what types of uses are desirable in the two special industrial zones in the downtown study area. Zoning could then encourage these types of uses.

>>The zoning anomalies map in this plan shows other land use issues that need to be addressed.

## **INVENTORY OF EXISTING PUBLIC ART**

### **Municipally owned properties:**

City Hall: permanent art collection of the city

Memorial Hall-- Interior: assorted bronze plaques of war dead in main lobby

Memorial Hall-- Exterior: two bronze sculptures (Civil

### **Process, Outreach and Partnerships**

\*Create process for public participation for issues of parking, building reuse, agricultural preservation, youth spaces and activities, elder, neighborhoods, transportation, and maintenance of downtown facilities (short term)

\*\*\***Ongoing public participation, cable television and community forums for more citizen and "stakeholder" involvement, use Internet (short to long term)**

\*Increase community awareness of municipal processes and board responsibilities and insure diverse membership on boards (medium term)

\*Community outreach to businesses and neighborhoods to draw on the strengths of downtown and Florence (short term)

\*Business cooperation to encourage greater use of local businesses, e.g., sales, fundraising, discounts and advertising (short term)

\*Integrate urban planning into public school curriculum (short term)

\*Do outreach to Latino community (medium term)

\*\*\***Work with police to insure public safety, bicycle and foot patrols and enforcement of pedestrian and vehicle laws, including jaywalkers, and winter litter and snow clearing requirements**

\*Better pedestrian education (short term)

\*Support efforts for a local bank (long term)

\*Support efforts to insure continuation of a Northampton airport (long term)

War soldier and Civil War sailor) and the Northampton Remembers Memorial (granite sculpture)

Forbes Library-- Interior: numerous pieces of art

Forbes Library-- Exterior: memorial bench

Pulaski Park: Granite sculpture to honor Casimir Pulaski and Northampton Artifacts (Time Capsule, ca. 1976)



Private and County owned property:

Hampshire County Courthouse-- Exterior:

Bust of Calvin Coolidge with bronze plaque,  
1902 stone fountain with names of towns,  
bronze and stone marker to honor those who  
served during the Persian Gulf War, and  
1912 bronze and stone marker to honor First  
Meeting House.

NYNEX , 61 Masonic Street: "The History of Women  
in Northampton from 1600 to 1980" mural.

Midway Electric, 135 King Street: Lightbulbs and  
fixtures mural.

Hampton Court Plaza, 20 Hampton Ave.: Stone  
fountain.

Boston & Maine Railroad Trestle Bridge: Leland  
Johnston's "Dream" mural on the bridge's  
east side and Lucy Baird Menousek's metal  
train sculpture on the bridge's west side.

Crackerbarrel Alley: Jonathan Kohrman's  
"Skateboarders" mural.

64 Gothic Street: Marble fountain

**DOWNTOWN PEDESTRIAN FLOW COUNTS: SPRING AND SUMMER 1994**

	Main St across Crafts Ave	Main St in front of Thornes	Main St. cross by Thornes	Main St. across Center St.	Main St./ Pleasant St.	low. Main, King to Pleasant
<b>2:00-2:15 PM 6/8/94</b>	107	136				
<b>2:15-2:30 PM 6/8/94</b>	130	154				
<b>2:30-2:45 PM 6/8/94</b>	100	148				
<b>2:45-3:00 PM 6/8/94</b>	109	175				
<b>4:30-4:45 PM 7/6/94</b>	74	80				
<b>4:45-5:00 PM 7/6/94</b>	78	74				
<b>12:45-1:00 7/12/94</b>					151	51
<b>1:00-1:15 PM 7/12/94</b>					124	45
<b>1:15-1:30 PM 7/12/94</b>					151	56
<b>1:30-1:45 PM 7/12/94</b>			86	99		
<b>1:45-2:00 PM 7/12/94</b>			92	105		
<b>MAXIMUM</b>	130	175	92	105	151	56
<b>MEAN/HOUR</b>						

(All dates are mid-week. 7/6/94 was hot and humid, all other dates were warm and dry.)